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GODDESS OF A CITY, OR CYBELE (?)  
GREEK, FOURTH CENTURY B. C.

*Gift of the Founders Society, 1941*

## A FRENCH GOTHIC IVORY DIPTYCH

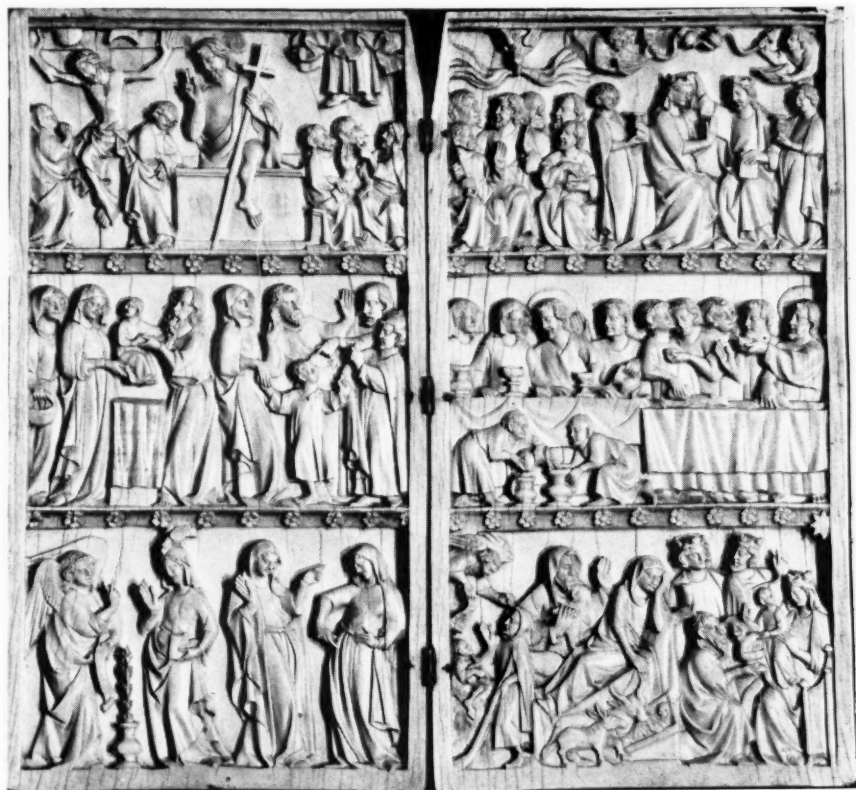
FROM the middle of the thirteenth century to the beginning of the fifteenth century, ivory carving flourished in France and, under the influence of France in other European countries. Unlike the other materials of the arts, metals which can be melted down, wood which perishes, stone which deteriorates, or vellum which is easily destroyed, ivory lends itself to no useful transformation, cannot be readily reused, and is very durable. This accounts for the fact that so many examples of ivory carving have survived from the Middle Ages and particularly from the later mediaeval period when, as the great architectural sculpture of the thirteenth century reached its climax and waned, the ivory carvers took up the Gothic style and became among its best exponents and its widest propagators.

In the Middle Ages it would appear that the illuminator of manuscripts and the carver of ivories led the way and established the styles, even the subject matter, for the architectural sculptors, the decorators of the Romanesque and early Gothic churches. In the second half of the thirteenth century, however, it was the sculptors in stone who were the masters of the carvers in ivory and gave them the style which, with some conservative delay, they followed into the fourteenth century. At this time, in fact, the ivory workers were not a separate guild but were included in a number of guilds, many of them with the sculptors or *imagiers tailleurs*. Although the archives have yielded the names of some of these ivory carvers, their work is not identified as they did not sign their products, maintaining the anonymity characteristic of the mediaeval artist.

These carvers in ivory made a great number of objects for use in the home, in business, or in the church and oratory. Combs, writing tablets, mirror cases, caskets, and knife handles are among their secular productions; statuettes of the Virgin and reliefs of scenes from the New Testament or the legends of the saints were among the religious objects. These reliefs were commonly combined either as the wings of a shrine for a figure or in pairs as a diptych which served as a portable altarpiece and an aid to devotion.

By far the largest and most important Gothic ivory carving in the collection on view at the Detroit Institute of Arts is a diptych<sup>1</sup> on the leaves of which in three registers, are represented fourteen scenes from the life of the Virgin and of Christ, so mingled as to make a unit of the two lives from the moment of the Annunciation to the Coronation of the Virgin by her Son. The registers are separated by mouldings ornamented with cinquefoils or rosettes in relief. The two panels are intended to be read together, the scenes running chronologically from left to right through the three registers, beginning at the lower left and ending at the upper right. The subjects are as follows: the Annunciation, the Visitation, the Annunciation to the Shepherds, the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, the Presentation in the Temple, Christ Discovered among the Doctors, the Miracle at the Marriage of Cana, the Last Supper, the Crucifixion, the Resurrection, the Ascension, the Descent

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IVORY DIPTYCH: SCENES FROM THE LIFE OF CHRIST AND THE VIRGIN  
FRENCH GOTHIC, FIRST HALF OF FOURTEENTH CENTURY

*Gift of Robert H. Tannahill, 1940*

of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, and the Coronation of the Virgin. This notable example of Gothic ivory carving is the recent gift of Robert H. Tannahill whose generous gifts and loans from his collection have greatly strengthened the representation of mediaeval art in the museum.

In 1924 Raymond Koechlin published his great three-volume corpus<sup>2</sup> of French Gothic ivories which included over thirteen hundred of the extant Gothic pieces which the author generally attributed to French artists from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. He further indicated that there were many more French ivories unpublished, as well as a great number of Gothic ivories undoubtedly produced in other European countries. The Detroit diptych is, however, neither illustrated nor recorded in Koechlin's publication. The history of this ivory is not entirely known but tradition says that it came from the Treasury of the Cathedral of Laon in northeastern France, before passing through the collections of Maurice Sulzbach in Paris and Robert H. Tannahill in Detroit.

The present publication of this diptych throws into the arena another prize for which scholars may engage in combat. What is the time and place

of its origin? Is it French, English, or Italian? What are its stylistic relations? These are among the problems raised by this ivory. French Gothic the diptych certainly is, in style, if not in origin, but the certainty with which almost all Gothic ivories were once attributed to French workshops has been shattered in recent years with the rise of a new discrimination among mediaeval scholars who realize that in a period like the fourteenth century (during the first half of which the Detroit ivory was produced) when the Gothic style of France became widespread in Europe, the true picture of the history of this style can only be gained by the separation of Gothic works made in France from those made elsewhere, as in Italy, Germany, England, or Spain, after French models or inspiration.

After a period in which all skilled work in the crafts was called Italian, Koechlin and others reaffirmed the French origin (in spirit or in fact) of such works as the majority of the Gothic ivories. Lately, however, the great corpus of French Gothic ivories, so helpfully published by Koechlin, is being torn asunder by those who are studying more closely the style and iconography (the manner of representation of traditional subject matter) of those ivories, thereby distinguishing ateliers of production and localities of origin on sounder bases than those employed by Koechlin.

Among the categories which Koechlin set up is that of the "Diptychs with Rosette Decoration," a group including ivories ornamented with rosettes like those on the Detroit diptych. Koechlin's choice of such a common feature, so easily imitated, reveals the fundamental fallacy of his classifications. The group of ivories with rosette decoration, which to be sure, Koechlin makes clear is not the work of one atelier, does, in fact, include such disparate styles, not to mention extraordinary iconographic features, that it is not surprising that the recent studies of D. D. Egbert<sup>3</sup> and C. R. Morey<sup>4</sup> have shown that the ivories with rosette decoration have a varied origin, some of them certainly being Italian imitations of French models. The ivories with rosette decoration are then not the work of a single atelier, nor of one master and his pupils or imitators, nor are they all the products of French workshops any more than they are of English origin as some have sought to prove.<sup>5</sup>

A study of the style, iconography, provenience and technique of the Detroit diptych favors the assumption that it is a French work of the early part of the fourteenth century. The style seems transitional between the static idealism of the thirteenth century and the affected realism of the second half of the fourteenth century; it has a flowing quality of line and gesture which suggests the curvilinear style of the fourteenth century rather than the angular manner of the early period. The iconography betrays no serious variants from traditional procedure, but here and there are details, like the weeping John at the Crucifixion who leans on the tomb of the adjoining Resurrection, which reveal the tenderness and growing intensity of human feeling which mark the Gothic style as it approaches the Renaissance.

That the Detroit diptych may have once been in the treasury of the Cathedral of Laon, dedicated to *Nôtre Dame*, is not in itself sufficient evidence of a French origin, but the subject matter of the diptych, which surely aims at the glorification of the Virgin, suggests it may have come early into the cathedral which bears her name. One technical feature is good evidence for the origin of the ivory north of the Alps and probably in France, the form of the hinges which are set in oblique slots, held by pins inserted at right

angles to the hinge plates; Italian hinges were commonly of interlocking wire loops.

While realizing the limitations of Koechlin's category of the ivories with rosette decoration, it may be noted that of the examples he assembled only two have iconographic programs similar to that of the Detroit diptych: a diptych in the Archaeological Museum of Lille (Koechlin No. 250, pl. LXIV) and a diptych in the collection of Charles Mège in Paris (Koechlin No. 251; illustrated in *Les Arts*, No. 86, February, 1909, p. 8). The former presents almost identical scenes with a different placing on the three registers, executed in a style that is stiff and cramped. The latter has identical scenes in the identical locations but with numerous variations in detail and a marked difference in style.

In the Mège diptych the figures fill the spaces they occupy, their heads generally crowding close to the upper edge of the scene. Poses and gestures are more intense; facial types highly accentuated; the whole rendering more restive and emotional. Although a model like the Detroit ivory, even the Detroit carving itself, may have been the inspiration of the Mège diptych, it is apparent that the artist of the latter ivory carving belonged to another school and was possibly a German imitator of a French Gothic work. The comparison of these two ivories gives a glimpse of the methods of the mediaeval ivory workers who followed traditional subject matter, even complete traditional schemes, but handled details and style according to local training and personal ability. The comparison further shows the wide variation of style among members of the rosette group.

This discussion reveals rather than solves the archaeological problems presented by this single Gothic ivory carving. On its own merits, as a work of art, the diptych stands firmly among the masterpieces of its period.

FRANCIS W. ROBINSON

<sup>1</sup> Accession Number: 40.165. Dimensions (each panel): Height:  $9\frac{3}{16}$  inches; width:  $5\frac{3}{16}$  inches; thickness:  $\frac{3}{8}$  inch. Faint traces of original polychromy, notably on altar-cloth in Presentation and tomb in Resurrection. Carved from two pieces of the same block of ivory as indicated by the grain. A corner broken off inner edge of each panel above uppermost of three hinges. Hinges of type used in European ivories north of the Alps. Gift of Robert H. Tannahill, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>R. Koechlin, *Les Ivoires Gothiques Français*, Paris, 1924.

<sup>3</sup>D. D. Egbert, "Northern Italian Gothic Ivories in the Museo Cristiano of the Vatican Library," *Art Studies*, Vol. 7 (1929), pp. 169-206.

<sup>4</sup>C. R. Morey, *Gli Oggetti di Avorio e di Osso del Museo Sacro Vaticano*, Citta del Vaticano, 1936, pp. 25-42.

<sup>5</sup>W. Maskell, *A Description of Ivories, Ancient and Mediaeval, in the South Kensington Museum*, London, 1872.

## TEXTILE ART IN GUATEMALA

MR. ROBERT H. TANNAHILL, always a friend of the Textile Department, has added to his former gifts a charming specimen of the native weaver's craft of Guatemala.<sup>1</sup>

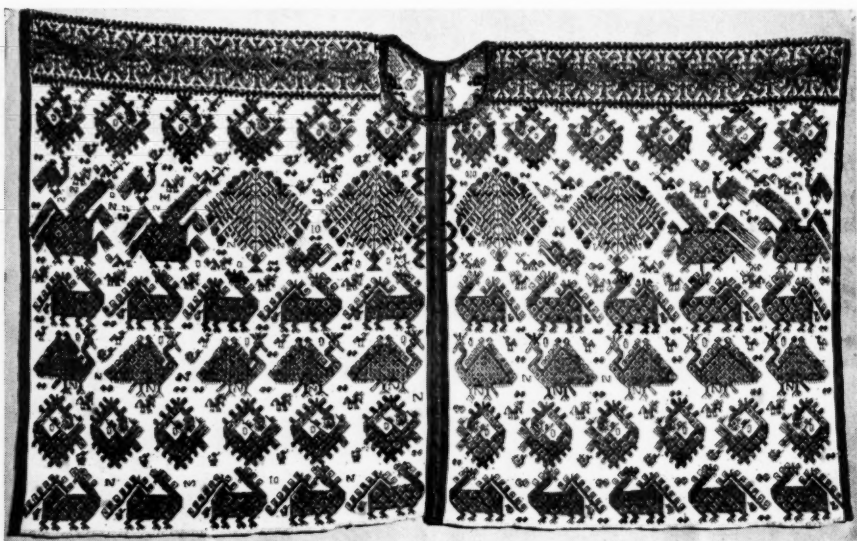
The huipil (Aztec: *huipili*) comes from San Pedro Sacatepèquez, a village renowned for fine textiles. It consists of two widths of white cotton, with purple selvages and ends of run marked by barely visible purple wefts. Back and front are covered with row after row of birds and quadrupeds, in stately pro-



cession towards trees growing from vases. Innumerable tiny animals, placed apparently haphazard, give vitality to the design. Single letters, O, N, M, may be the weaver's or owner's initials. Back and front are connected by the *mano*, the shoulder line decorated with a continuous design of doubleheaded eagles in a highly advanced degree of stylization.

The attractive pattern is brocaded throughout in untwisted cotton yarn of soft purple hue; details are picked out in vermillion cotton and in purple, magenta, green and yellow silk. The round neck is finished with several rows of buttonhole stitching of the various silks; of magenta silk is also the *randa*, the center seam; the sides are left open.

The huipil, worn both as blouse and jacket, is the most picturesque, most lavishly decorated element of the Guatemalan woman's costume. Often only the back is patterned and certain huipiles are quite plain, with only decoration



HUIPIL  
GUATEMALAN, CONTEMPORARY  
*Gift of Robert H. Tannabill, 1940*

at the neckline. Most beautiful are those made at San Pedro Sacatepèquez, one of the villages where old traditions have been preserved by the Indians. One of these tells of Hunahpu, the Toltec ruler who taught his subjects, the Quiché Indians, the use of cotton which grows plentifully in the lowlands of Guatemala. In old times a beautiful soft purple dye was obtained from *purpura patula*, a marine shellfish; today commercial dyes have mostly supplanted the painstaking preparation of nature's pigments. Sericulture has been attempted without success; the *seda floja*, badly dyed untwisted silk yarn, is imported. Many weavers even prefer imported cotton yarn to their own laboriously prepared material, and the pedal loom, originally imported from Spain is rapidly supplanting the primitive hand loom.

Guatemala was conquered by Pedro de Alvarado in 1522 to 1524. The Spaniards found a pleasant country, rich in bird-life. One most beautiful bird,

the golden-tailed quetzal (*Trogon resplendens*), has been adopted as the national emblem. On the huipil it is pictured in proud independence, looking down on the other animals, among which only the peacock, *animal de Castilla*, is clearly recognizable.

The modern huipiles of San Pedro Sacatepéquez are a good trade article but all too spectacular. It is to be hoped that the new trend of weaving, so successfully fostered in certain Guatemalan centers, will soon reach this village and give new life to an old craft.

ADELE COULIN WEIBEL

<sup>1</sup>Accession number: 40.134; Height: 55 inches; width: 52 inches. Gift of Robert H. Tannahill, 1940.



FRITZ

BY WILLIAM S. SCHWARTZ, AMERICAN, 1896—

Gift of Mrs. Anna Lavick Werbe, 1941

## A WATERCOLOR by WILLIAM S. SCHWARTZ

THE watercolor painting "Fritz" by William S. Schwartz<sup>1</sup> has been added to the permanent collection through the gift of Anna Lavick Werbe. This painting, portraying a sturdy and contented American farmer at the full fruition of manhood, is one of the more pleasing works of this artist, whose career belongs largely to the Middle West.

Born in Russia in 1896, William S. Schwartz first studied at the Vilna Art School. Upon his arrival in America, he settled in Chicago and it is there that his works are best known. Cognizant of the many modern movements, he has been influenced at times in the direction of abstract

painting and at other times in the direction of an uncompromising realism. These explorations along devious trails have added to his artistic equipment a technical knowledge and an understanding which makes for a very personal style in his later paintings. The street scenes, still life subjects and interesting character studies, (of which our watercolor is an example), as seen in his recent canvases retain the rhythmic design and the vibrant color which characterized his earlier and more abstract paintings.

The work of Schwartz is not unknown to Detroit as it has been exhibited here on numerous occasions at the Jewish Community Center, whose enterprising exhibitions of the work of Jewish artists were initiated and have been carried on for a number of years by Mrs. Werbe. It was from a recent group exhibition of his works in Detroit that this picture was selected by the Art Institute authorities and presented by Mrs. Werbe.

<sup>1</sup>Accession number: 41.11. Height 25 inches; width: 19 $\frac{3}{4}$  inches. Watercolor. Gift of Mrs. Anna Lavick Werbe, 1941.

## Calendar of Events for May

### EXHIBITIONS

The Detroit Institute of Arts:

Through May 31—*Masterpieces of Art from Two World's Fairs*. (Admission 25c, Thursdays free.)

May 1 through May 31—*Recent Accessions in the Print Department*.

Alger House:

May 1 through June 1—*19th and 20th Century French Drawings lent by the Fogg Museum of Art, Harvard University, and the Museum of Modern Art, New York*.

### TUESDAY EVENING LECTURES

A series of three illustrated lectures, admission free, will be presented by Francis W. Robinson, on *Great Artists in the Exhibition of Masterpieces of Art* on the following Tuesday evenings at 8:30 in the lecture hall of the Art Institute:

May 6: *Italian Renaissance Masters*.

May 13: *Spanish and British Masters*.

May 20: *French Masterpieces*.

### FRIDAY AFTERNOON COURSE

Given by Isabel Weadock on *Great Epochs of Print-Making* at 3:30 P. M. in the Print Room. Admission charge, 50c; for Members of the Founders Society, 25c.

May 2: *The Nineteenth Century - French Portrait Engravers*.

May 9: *Modern Print-Makers*.

### GALLERY TALKS

Given daily (except Mondays) on the *Masterpieces of Art Exhibition* at 2:30 and on Thursdays and Fridays at 8:30 P. M.

### SATURDAY AFTERNOON RADIO TALKS

Given by John D. Morse on *The Human Side of Art* each Saturday afternoon at 1:15 over Station WWJ throughout May.

### HOURS OF ADMISSION

The Detroit Institute of Arts, 5200 Woodward Avenue at Kirby, is open free daily except Mondays and Christmas Day. Visiting hours: Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 1 to 5 and 7 to 10; Wednesday, 1 to 5; Saturday, 9 to 5; Sunday, 2 to 6. The Alger House Museum, 32 Lake Shore Road, Grosse Pointe Farms, a branch museum for Italian Renaissance Art and temporary exhibitions, is open free daily except Mondays from 1 to 5. Telephones: Detroit Institute of Arts, COLUMBIA 0360; Alger House Museum, TUXEDO 2-3888; Detroit Museum of Arts Founders Society, COLUMBIA 4274.



